

Selkirk Trailblazers
P.O. Box 282
Ione, Washington 99139

November 2nd, 2020

The Selkirk Trailblazers have discussed the Sxwuytn 'Trail' - Kaniksu Connections Project #54315 in depth with our membership following the recent public meetings held virtually in October 2020 and we remain committed in our view that there are both areas of agreement and disagreement with the proposal.

We fully support all efforts being undertaken to reduce fuel loads and increase logging activity thru proposed timber sales in this area. These activities benefit the public by reducing risk of catastrophic, large scale forest fires and increasing economic activity in Pend Oreille County, which is badly needed. We are also fully supportive of all work in this project that increases trail connectivity with our neighboring lands in Idaho as this increases recreational opportunities for the public and will assist in increasing economic activity for the local community as people come to take advantage of new areas.

We remain opposed to **any new** mechanical decommissioning of roads in this area, or in any part of the forest as they run counter to providing benefit to the membership of our organization, the local communities affected, or the general public. Our opposition is based on the following aspects of maintaining the current road network;

1. Both the Gray Paper (2018) and McCauley paper (2019) support keeping even more roads open for forest management that ultimately mitigates climate change and reduces global greenhouse gasses. The basis of those works, and the personal experience of our membership, many of whom work in the forest on a daily basis, and others who are avid hunters, hikers, and outdoor recreation enthusiasts is that many of the "roads" that are detectable using advanced electronic means (LIDAR) are no longer roads. The forest has naturally reclaimed those roads that have not been used by vehicles, in some cases for more than 50 years, and they are, in fact, decommissioned. In the public meeting/presentation held in October 2020, specific mention was made of road surfaces being so heavily covered with vegetation that they were difficult even to walk on. Those roads should be considered decommissioned and taken off of

the existing inventory of roads in the forest. The process of new, mechanical decommissioning will create significantly more disruption in the forest, sedimentation in the watershed, and divert funds that can be used to maintain existing roads, replace culverts, etc. An excellent example of where this could benefit all forest users is on the Cee Cee Ah road south of Pyramid Pass. Several years ago the U.S Forest Service removed a culvert from the road with no apparent plan or funding to replace it. This allows the water to run directly over the road, creating sedimentation issues that they now claim need to be addressed. This effectively closed the road to vehicle traffic, impacting all forest users who enjoyed the use of the road. It more directly impacts the winter recreation users as this road is on a groomed snowmobile route from the Kings Lake Sno-Park. Diverting funds from unnecessary decommissioning to road maintenance projects like replacement of this particular culvert provides a benefit to a large, diverse group of forest users.

2. Roads support law enforcement/first responder/search and rescue personnel as they conduct their missions. The removal from inventory of roads that are not trafficable even to persons traveling on foot will not impact this effort. In the event of criminal activity in the forest and injured/lost persons in the forest, the remaining road network, with better maintenance supported by diverting funds from decommissioning to maintenance, can be used by our law enforcement/first responder community to access the forest. The first responder community understands full well the value of any existing, usable road can save precious time in an emergency situation.
3. Roads support fire fighters when forest fires break out. Again, removal of roads that have been reclaimed by nature will not significantly impact this function, but it is imperative that all remaining roads be properly maintained so that when needed by our fire-fighting community, which is a very limited resource, they can be used to maximum advantage. The use of the existing road network speeds the response time of firefighters and thus allows them to begin their work of reducing the catastrophic damage that occurs from large scale, catastrophic forest fires.
4. Roads support the logging economy. The Selkirk Trailblazers are fully supportive of all efforts to log and reduce fuel loads on our public lands. In this area, the decommissioning of any road may ultimately have a negative impact on the logging community. As timber harvesting/fuel reduction is a part of this proposal,

it seems counter-productive to look at decommissioning roads can be used to support these important aspects of the project.

5. The membership of the Selkirk Trailblazers understand how fortunate we are to live in this area and we value the opportunity to provide our input to the process of improving forest management in a multi-faceted approach. People come specifically to this area in order to enjoy the many outdoor activities that are available year round. These activities involve both motorized and non-motorized recreation on our public land. We firmly believe that the existing, usable road network should be opened to all users and it should be maintained for those uses. While the removal of some existing “roads”, which have been naturally reclaimed by the forest, specifically those “roads” that have been closed for many years and are so effectively covered by vegetation that they are no longer usable, will not significantly impact the membership of our organization or the general forest user, we strongly object to any new, mechanical decommissioning, instead urging all users to divert funds to improving/maintaining the existing road network and opening all roads to all users. Members of the motorized recreation community, both summer and winter, use the existing road network to access our public lands and enjoy them as intended.